



STATE OF MICHIGAN

**Family
Independence
Agency**

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DOUGLAS E. HOWARD, Director

News Release

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Date: September 14, 2001

FIA Honors Kalamazoo County Woman

KALAMAZOO—Douglas E. Howard, director of the Family Independence Agency (FIA) presented the agency's September Achiever of the Month Award to Reqwal Heard of Kalamazoo during a ceremony held today, at the Kalamazoo County Family Independence Agency located in Kalamazoo.

The Achiever of the Month Award was established in October 1993 to recognize persons making outstanding progress toward self-sufficiency under Michigan's comprehensive welfare reform initiative *To Strengthen Michigan Families*. Reqwal Heard was selected to receive the September award because of her determination to become independent of the welfare system despite significant barriers to her success.

Ms. Heard is the mother of two children. She first turned to the Kalamazoo County FIA for assistance in May 1995. At that time, she had just given birth to her first child, was working at a job with limited earnings and needed financial help to maintain her living arrangements.

(more)



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

Reqwal received Aid for Dependent Children, now known as Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits, food stamps and Medicaid to help provide for her family.

For several years Reqwal worked at a variety of part-time jobs and was on and off assistance. However, despite her efforts she continued to struggle to make ends meet. It soon became apparent to Reqwal that she needed additional education to achieve her goal of maintaining independence from public assistance.

Reqwal first began pursuing a degree in elementary education in 1988. She received academic and athletic scholarships, which enabled her to study at Jackson State University in Mississippi. Later, she transferred to Mott Community College in Flint, where she earned an associate's degree. Later, she attended the University of Michigan in Flint and finally, Western Michigan University.

Working and going to school proved extremely challenging. While she was completing her student teaching assignment at Indian Prairie school, Reqwal got behind in her rent and utility bills and was threatened with eviction. The FIA helped her maintain a stable home for her family by providing emergency cash assistance for rent and utilities. In addition, car repairs were authorized to supply her with reliable transportation and when she started a new part-time job at National City bank, the FIA supplied her with the funds to purchase clothing for work.

On June 23, 2001, Reqwal earned a bachelor's of science degree and teaching certificate from Western Michigan University. Currently, she teaches at Northglade Elementary in Kalamazoo. Her cash assistance case closed due to earnings in August 2001. She continues to receive child day care and transitional Medicaid, which provides health care services for her family for up to one year after the end of FIP.

Reqwal Heard was selected to receive the September 2001 Achiever of the Month Award because she has consistently worked hard to provide a better future for her family and because of her extraordinary efforts to become independent of the welfare system.

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